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ABSTRACT

In the next decade, the American campus will be under constant pressure from minorities, industry, welfare departments and hospitals to help improve urban life. These pressures will be so great that the university's only alternative to lack of commitment will be the discovery of a new "American" concept of education, such as the creation of an urban grant college geared to the needs of the cities. Instruction in the urban grant college would balance work performed in and out of the classroom. Pre-professional students would not only use the community as a laboratory, but also provide services which could include home demonstrations. Research should be primarily of an applied nature and relevant to urban problems. Cities need the knowledge and direct assistance that only an educational organization can supply, but in order to give that kind of assistance, the colleges must be totally dedicated to the cities themselves. (AF)

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The Urban Grant College:

A College Without Walls

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THE URBAN GRANT COLLEGE
A COLLEGE WITHOUT WALLS

> No wonder the university in America is in such a mess. It has accepted too many responsibilities, deversified itself away from its liberal arts tradition, and bartered away its own standards. Compared to its traditional counterpart, it is a supermarket - a commodity house selling its wares to the public.

This comment often heard today about the dilemma in higher education implies a yearning for the past, a return to some previous forms of higher education. The problem with this yearning is that we cannot return to the American University of yesterday, for the American University has yet to be born. The majority of criticism and conflict on our college campus is in reality not against the American University; it is in anticipation of it.

We are witnessing today the slow and sometimes painful emergence of the unique American institution of higher learning. It is not a warmed over European model strong in its ability to deal solely with theory. Rather, its strength will be its practicality, its ability to deal with social, enviromental and human problems.

The motivation for its emergence will not be found in the many accomplishments of higher education of the past but in anticipation of two major future interests -- the desperate need to improve the quality of urban life and the basic need of youth to relate learning to reality.

The accumulation of ten years of writing and discussion, culminating

in major warfare in many urban centers throughout our country, emphasize the tremendous need to solve the full range of problems related to the human condition in our cities. In the next decade the American campus will be under constant pressure from minorities, industry, welfare departments, and hospitals to make an application to urban life. These pressures will be so great that the university's only alternative to lack of commitment will be the discovery of a new "American" concept of higher education.

Pressure on the colleges and universities to meet urban needs will be equaled only by the desire for reality on the part of students. Except for a few Bolsheviks or nihilists who wish to decimate the campus, most students protest not out of dismay but out of hope for the emergence of the American University as a real, living agent of change in society. Students are able to project from ten years of history, first with civil rights, then with their participation in urban affairs through tutorial programs and neighborhood youth centers. They find that the American university must, as a measure of its uniqueness, be "where it's at." They see that the university in America can no longer transcent time and place as did its monastic counterpart, but must deal with the basic realities of life -- here and now. Sidney Harris states this idea quite aptly:

> If universities cannot intellectualize their neighborhoods, at least to some degree, then their influence on the social current is negligible, and their pretension to significance is absurd.

Once before in our history the need for a unique role of higher educational institutions existed which brought the creation of the Land

Grant College. During the past one hundred years, the Land Grant College System has helped to transform the agricultural segment of our society into the most successful and productive in the world.

The concept has brought outstanding academic contributions well beyond those in agriculture. While constituting fewer than five percent of the nation's colleges and universities, Land Grant Colleges enroll nearly thirty percent of all the nation's students. Nearly thirty percent of all bachelor's degrees and forty percent of all doctorates are awarded by the Land Grant Colleges. Among their alumni are more than one-half of all living American Nobel Prize Winners, while in their libraries and laboratories they also conduct one-half of all research in America. [1]

Today we need an Urban Grant College Act, modeled in part after the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the Morrill Act of 1863.

A parallel exists between the atmosphere of the mid-1800's prior to the Morrill Act and our need today for change in higher education as well. Consider the following description:

> Anything seemed possible to the nineteenth century civilization that was conquering one land after another by the industrial revolution and a new social enlightenment. Against this background the college education of earlier times seemed hopelessly antiquated; it had to be wrested out of the ruts in which it had so long traveled. A revolt against it grew, compounded primarily of four elements: rejection of the tyranny of classifical and theological studies, championship of science, insistence on attention to agriculture and the mechanic arts, and -- most important of all -- a demand for greater democracy in education.[2]

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1 National Association of Land Grant Colleges, Fact Book, National Association of Land Grant Colleges, Washington, D.C., 1968, p.1.

2 Allan Nevins, The Origin of the Land Grant College and State Universities, Washington, Civil War Centennial Commission 1962, p.8.

This break with tradition on the part of the Land Grant College could apply equally well to the establishment of the Urban Grant College. The base for each represents a trilogy of American ingenuity: instruction, research, and community services. In this concept of higher education, research and community service are coordinated, and a major purpose is to make the professors "practical" and the farmer or urban dweller "scientific."

Instruction, the first part of the trilogy, would balance work performed in and out of the classroom in the Urban Grant College. The classroom would be used to define and theorize problems, and the community would be the place to test and verify theory. Out-of-class experience would add reality to education so desperately desired by today's students, and field work within the community would allow feedback into the classroom.

The classroom and intellectual experience would remain indispensable, not supreme but tantamount to off campus experience. In concert the classroom and the urban environment would truly be a total learning society.

Each student could participate in a field experience that would parallel classroom experiences. For example, students would work in city agencies as teacher and counselor aids and as probation and hospital workers. This would afford each student a broadly based practical education in urban problems as well as an academic one.

Along with existing community agency facilities, experimental stations could be established for important laboratory experience. Such stations paralleling the Land Grant College could be developed in store front schools, youth employment centers, and other "on site" facilities.

Instruction, of course, is only one important part of the trilogy of American education. The second part, service to the community, is an equally important aspect. Pre-professional students would not only use the community as a laboratory but add appreciably to service to the community. Urban communities are notoriously short of qualified professionals, whether they be social workers or teachers. Student interns would augment professional staffs, thus multiplying the hours of actual service to the community.

Perhaps the students' community service could include home demonstrations. The contribution here in the areas of home economics, nursing, family and financial planning, nutrition, and child care would be especially significant. Students could also act as urban agents in aiding families who have no one person to turn to for general advice and support. This parallels the concept of farm agent in the Lant Grant College.

Inasmuch as the service aspect of the Urban Grant College would be reciprocal between town and gown, experienced community members would be included on the staff of the Urban Grant College. Special institutes and training programs would also be held on campus for community members. This further demonstrates the relationship between community and college and is particularly important when the home environment or the street is not conducive to learning.

The establishment of the Urban Grant College would force a new look at urban youths not only as students or as community aids but also as a vital source of encouragement and assistance to their peers to enter higher education. Many more mid-city youths can succeed in college and would attempt it if they had some reassurance and guidance by peer models already attending. Equally

important, these are the very same persons who could perform field work and benefit their own communities while in college. The Urban Grant College, then, should recruit students extensively from the mid-city.

Lastly, the research developed by the Urban Grant College, the third aspect of the trilogy, should be primarily of an applied nature with practical and relevant significance. As a part of the research program, various projects such as a senior project could be required of students, with topics relating to some urban problem. Hopefully, many would be "how to do it" projects in home nursing, child care, or community participation. These senior projects could be published in the language form and manner most understood by urban families and communities.

Just as Land Grant Colleges are placed closest to their area of need -- farming communities -- so would Urban Grant Colleges be placed where they could benefit most, within the mid-cities of each state of the Union. Existing Federal surplus or redevelopment land could be used for such institutions. The Urban Grant College would be part of each state's system of higher education, fully able to confer degrees, develop representative curricula and attract competent faculty by granting status comparable to other institutions of higher learning.

The above represents only a few aspects of an Urban Grant College. While most persons recognize the benefit of applying knowledge accumulated in the university, only a few seem to realize the need for a new and different type of institution to aid in the study and solution of our society's most significant

human problems. Analysis of some factors within today's college may reinforce this plea to consider a new kind of institution.

First, the traditions of university and college alike tend to separate them from the real problems of society. Their traditional roots - theoretical science, and religious absolutes - are thought to transcend the real world. Town and gown existed in two worlds.

Secondly, the college and university were also historically detached to insure their neutral position as social critics. But a critic who is aloof today from modern urban society soon finds his comments outdistanced by social change and his criticism obsolete.

Our cities sorely need the knowledge, understanding and direct assistance that only an educational organization can provide. Yet not all universities and colleges can offer their resources to the demands of the urban communities without disrupting their current direction and damaging their changes for traditional success.

Therefore, what is needed is a college dedicated primarily to an urban focus -- a college without walls, inseparable from its community; a college uncommitted to continuing prior successes or influences; a college combining and applying research and teaching with public service.

Some would argue that if the present four-year colleges are unable to provide these functions, possibly they should be provided by community and junior colleges. While these colleges grew largely out of community support, they lack important ingredients of the trilogy. First, they do not offer the last two years of professional preparation important in the application of

knowledge. Secondly, they lack almost entirely the research component, an equally important segment of the trilogy.

Another important factor is that few social theories are both discovered in the classroom and also verified there. A laboratory is needed for verification. This must be in the urban community.

The fact that present systems reward pure research almost exclusively is another reason only a new system of urban institutions is needed. Presently, graduate students earn Ph.D.s for pure research. The professor is advanced for the same reason. Unfortunately, if research is not applied in higher education, neither is teaching.

Lastly, the present departmental structures and narrow specializations in colleges force a "dissected approach" to current problems. In the case of the field of urban studies, public housing may be taught in one department, welfare in another, school finance and education in a third, and ghetto life in still a fourth. A multidisciplinary approach must be established so that all courses in urban affairs have some reference to the total problem and, therefore, are meaningful to students. This need infers a new organization for the academy.

The above factors identify the major areas of failure of the modern college or university to aggressively attempt solution of some of our most pressing problems.

It is time for an Urban Grant College System to be formed which is not dedicated to perpetuating the past but which anticipates the future of America.